



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# The Relations of History and Literature.

---

## AN ADDRESS

By WILLIAM PETERFIELD TRENT, A. M., Ph. D.,  
OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

---

**Delivered before the Annual Meeting of the Virginia Historical  
Society, January 4, 1906.**

---

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

The invitation to deliver the annual address before this society came to me as a great compliment and pleasure, and also as a commission which there could be no thought of declining. As I increase in age and in prudence, I try to manage to have a theme for an address before I accept an invitation to speak; but in this case I broke my precautionary rule, feeling that, if the Historical Society of my native State was willing to hear me, some sort of tutelary spirit would suggest a proper subject to me before my six months of grace were completely over. As the weeks went by, however, I realized that, while my conduct in one sense had been dutiful—perhaps, though my lot has long been cast in other places, I may still say filial—in another sense it had been very rash. No subject that seemed appropriate suggested itself, for the very obvious reason that, although my university training was specifically historical, my later studies have chiefly lain in the adjacent fields of literary history and criticism. Wanderers who return to their former homes never have much difficulty in holding forth about what they themselves have seen and done; if they are wise, they seldom attempt to discuss what has happened at home during their absence. It is better for them to ask questions and to listen. Just so, in all that concerns present knowledge and study of Virginia history, it would be better for me to occupy a retired seat on this floor. History, like all other studies, is a jealous mistress, and in these days of special scholarship and of widespread interest in matters historical and antiquarian, it is astonishing how far, in the short space

of a decade, a student who has not been heart-whole in his devotion can drop behind his fellow workers. You will surely, therefore, in view of what I have said, expect from me no direct contribution to your valuable labors in the domain of local historical research and of constructive historical writing; nor will you even look for specific expert criticism of the work you have accomplished.

But, while it is true that no man or body of men can today reasonably expect to achieve much success in any field of activity without a loyal and almost completely unswerving devotion to the chosen calling, it is equally true that no subject of human inquiry stands in absolute isolation. It follows that students of one branch of knowledge will occasionally do well to hear from students of cognate branches discussions of points lying, if I may so express it, in the mark or boundary between the contiguous provinces of knowledge. Thus, for example, the student of history can learn not a little from the anthropologist, the archæologist, and the geographer. I hesitate to suggest, for reasons which will be abundantly clear as we proceed, that in these days of scientific history the student of that subject has much to learn from the student of literature; yet, as some old-fashioned people still think of history as a branch, and a very noble branch of literature, and as even the scientific historians themselves do not deny that the alliance between history and literature was extremely close not a hundred years ago, I venture to hope that some remarks on the relations of the two subjects may not be out of place at this annual gathering of many of those Virginians who are interested in the annals of their Mother State. I cannot but think that you are as much concerned in having the world at large obtain an adequate acquaintance with the essential facts of Virginia's history as you are in knowing those facts yourselves, and practically the only knowledge of history the general reader has ever gained, so far as I am aware, has hitherto been got through the medium of literature. I do not myself believe that history and literature can be divorced without great loss to both. At any rate, if they have already been separated, as some historians tell us they have been, or, if they are destined to be parted in the near future, I should like to have the privilege, as one who has loved them

both and tried to serve them in a modest way, briefly to review their past and present relations and to protest against a hasty granting of that decree of divorce which some of my fellow students of history treated as an accomplished fact nearly twenty years ago.

I trust that my request to be allowed this privilege would not be deemed too bold by any audience; I am quite sure that it will not be so deemed here in Virginia. For we Virginians, who are preparing to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of the planting of Jamestown, who delight to recount the romantic story and the pathetic fate of Pocahontas, are surely not insensible to the facts that the age of the heroic explorers and first settlers was also the greatest creative epoch in the literature of our race, that George Sandys translated Ovid on the banks of the river that flows past our present capital, that about the time Captain John Smith was sending over to London the manuscript of his "True Relation," the first English book written on American soil, the master dramatist of the world, at the very height of his powers, was depicting the passion, dire yet forever enrapturing, of Antony and Cleopatra. It was a fascinating history and a fascinating literature that were in the making three hundred years ago, and when the student of the one is not also and by that very fact the student of the other, the two should at least try to meet frequently on a common ground and report to each other their experiences.

But suppose our two students thus meeting should accost each other with the very natural and appropriate questions—What is History? What is Literature? Is it not conceivable that their last state might be worse than their first? No one, to my knowledge, has ever succeeded in satisfactorily defining literature, and, to judge from the numerous attempts to define history, it is not clear that a consensus of opinion as to what their favorite study really is prevails today among historians, or, at least, that any such consensus has prevailed long enough to give it practical authority. We are constantly told in the words of Lord Bolingbroke, which he thought he got from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, that history is philosophy teaching by example. This phrase is not inapt as a description of a cer-

tain type of classical historical writing—for example, the histories of Thucydides and Tacitus. “Political philosophy teaching by example” would perhaps characterize not unfairly Grote’s massive “History of Greece.” But apply the phrase to such a treatise as Stubbs’s “Constitutional History of England” or to such a narrative as Prescott’s “Conquest of Mexico,” and it appears at once to be almost ludicrously inappropriate. Philosophy, it would seem, should be written by persons with a philosophical training and cast of mind; but our graduate schools for historical study, while they may insist on a knowledge of French and German, do not insist on any knowledge of philosophy as a prerequisite to successful work. The most famous definition or description of history is therefore seen to be much too narrow.

Lord Macaulay said, “that history, at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy.” This is delightfully vague. Cowper once got from the heel of an old shoe the suggestion for a fairly good poem; but if Stubbs had been alive and writing in Cowper’s day, the amiable poet would have been sorely tasked if he had tried to extract any subject for poetry from the three most famous volumes of the eminent prelate-historian, unless, to be sure, he had written a satire upon the universal aridity of scientific history. “A compound of poetry and philosophy” indeed! Even Lord Macaulay’s own fascinating “History” is not that for those of us who see in that famous work a good deal more than the rhetorical proclamation of the glories of English Whigism which some disdainful moderns have discovered in volumes declared by their fathers to be more interesting than most novels. What could Macaulay have found better to say of Milton’s “Comus” than that it was a “compound of poetry and philosophy?” And what would he have said to Burke and Fox, who, arguing with the Duke of Richmond, maintained that truth was to be found in poetry rather than in history? Those two eminent men, one of whom wrote history, evidently believed that poetry and history were somewhat antithetical. Finally, where is the rash man who will undertake to tell us what poetry is and what philosophy is?

But the distinguished names I have been mentioning, save

that of Stubbs, belong to what my friends of the present historical school are just too polite to call "The Dark Ages of Historiography." Let us descend the stream of time until we come to a Norman keep still in a fair state of preservation—I mean, in unfigurative language, let us pass on to the historian of the Norman Conquest, the late Mr. Edward Augustus Freeman, who, although he confined himself as closely to printed sources as he did to Saxon words and to prehistoric plainness of speech, will perhaps be accepted by the modern school as one of themselves. When I was a student of history at the Johns Hopkins University, my eyes were confronted each day with a sententious utterance of Mr. Freeman's which my excellent teacher, the late Professor Herbert B. Adams, had had painted in large letters upon the wall of his seminary room and library, so that all who came to read might at least read that. "History is past politics; Politics is present history," that was the legend that stared us in our innocent faces. I thought then, and I still think, that Mr. Freeman was very hard on his favorite study. Man never has lived by politics alone. Some individuals have done it, some continue to do it; but they have run and still run great risk of becoming disreputable. The historian who confines himself to politics past and present is not disreputable; he is only one-sided and often one-eyed. Perhaps it is impolite to suggest that the reason political historians have so long exercised a sort of sway over readers of history becomes clear the moment we remember that the one-eyed man is king among the blind.

This finding flaws in definitions and descriptions is, however, a facile and a comparatively unprofitable operation. We are all convinced that there is such a study as history as well as a body of writings called historical, both of which we can separate in a rough and ready manner from chemistry, let us say, on the one hand and from the drama on the other. Such a definition as that given by "The Century Dictionary," suffices for most of our purposes. History, says that authority is "the recorded events of the past, also, that branch of science which is occupied with ascertaining and recording the facts of the past." You as a historical society are occupied with ascertaining and recording the facts of Virginia history. I, as a teacher of English litera-

ture, am occupied with introducing my students to the most important works in prose and verse in which the writers of our race have embodied their thoughts and feelings. Both history and literature as complex conceptions of the mind may entirely elude our respective efforts to define them; but we shall none the less continue to love and prosecute our chosen studies.

And sometimes a catholic-minded man applies himself to defining or describing our studies in such a way as to enlighten us—at least for the time being. When Professor C. H. Firth delivered his inaugural lecture at Oxford, he gave a description of history to which I personally take little or no exception. History seemed to him “to mean the record of the life of societies of men, of the changes which those societies have gone through, of the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies, and of the material conditions which have helped or hindered their development.” Nor did history appear to him to be “only a branch of learning to be studied for its own sake, but a kind of knowledge which is useful to men in daily life, the end and aim of all history being, as Sir Walter Raleigh says, ‘to teach us by example of times past such wisdom as may guide our desires and actions.’”

Professor Firth went on to ask whether history is a science or an art, and he answered his own query by saying that to him “truth seems to lie between these two extremes. History is neither, but it partakes of the nature of both. A two fold task lies before the historian. One half of his business is the discovery of the truth, and the other its representation.”

These temperate words constitute a description of history broad enough, it would seem, to satisfy the most exigent. The historian of institutions, the historian of political events, the historian of manners, and the historian of the arts finds his respective and specific field of research included within the confines of history, as Professor Firth understands the term. Even the historian of literature may stand without shame beside the historian of battles and sieges. The writer of a minute, laborious monograph has a place as well defined as that of the author of a picturesque narrative or the bold generalizer in that rather nebulous study known as the philosophy of history.

But, unfortunately, temperate words are not usually wel-

comed by men flushed with victory, and the scientific study of history has won so many splendid triumphs in the past fifty or seventy-five years that its votaries have apparently been intoxicated by success and have become in consequence somewhat arrogant and intolerant. They speak with open disdain, not merely of former imperfect attempts to philosophize on the facts of history, but even of any present or future dream of such an attempt. They seem to view with an eye of grieved concern such of their number as are guilty of imparting to their writings the graces of style or display even a rudimentary sense for the picturesque and the dramatic elements of composition. Too frequently, when they have occasion to refer to the writers whom we are accustomed to denominate "the standard historians," they are contemptuous, when they are not insulting. Gibbon indeed, they leave to the attacks of Mr. Ruskin and the ultra-orthodox—but Hume and Robertson, Macaulay, Carlyle, and Michelet they treat as proper targets for every sort of missile. When a spirit of compunction seizes them, they administer a *coup de grace* to their victim by declaring that he is merely a great writer whom they turn over to that useless but rather harmless freak, the critic of literature. Sometimes they are even scornful enough to ignore the very existence of the "standard historians." One of the ablest historical students in this country confessed to me not long since that he had scarcely read one of them through in his life. He occasionally referred to their volumes, but got nothing for his pains. They did not know how to use their "sources," and my friend did, for he had been trained in the scientific school. Our conversation ended with the "standard historians" in eclipse for that evening at least, since it scarcely seemed worth while for me to make certain observations which I shall now venture to present.

Yet, after all, is it worth while for a single voice to lift itself in opposition to a chorus of self satisfied and successful men who pause from their useful labors just long enough, it would seem, to sing their own praises and to chant the dirges of their unfortunate predecessors? Or it is worth while, instead of trying to drown their chorus, to ask them to pause and listen to a few questions?

Is not the sort of historical writing most in vogue today the re-



sult of a perfectly natural evolution from the credulous story-telling of Herodotus, for whom truth and fiction, history and poetry were but crudely differentiated, through the successful attempt of Thucydides to make a philosophic grouping of events in order to explain a catastrophe, on through the wider survey of peoples and their achievements made by Polybius, through Livy's patriotic exposition of a nation's rise and progress and through Tacitus's dark and partisan portrayal of an empire's shame and decline, through these famous narratives and others scarcely less famous to the works of feebler men in periods becoming darker and more confused, until history, like every other branch of learning, suffered, not extinction indeed, but a great and prolonged dimming of its light in the ages that witnessed the death of the ancient and the birth of the mediaeval world? Mixed with literature, mixed with philosophy, colored with patriotism, colored with partisanship, springing out of the darkness of unconsciousness, ending in the darkness of confusion, history obviously had little chance to grow into a science, though a spirit of investigation and a demand for truth were then abroad in the world, as well as a zest for speculation in philosophy. History in those days could not be very critical, though the narratives we owe to it are priceless even today, when inscriptions and coins often furnish us with safer data for constructing the records of the past than are given by the professed historians. But the mere encouragement of the spirit of inquiry, the spread of the love of truth, the fostering of national pride, the chastising of public and private vices—these services rendered by history and historians were not small ones, and the development of the power of generalizing on events, of ordering a clear consecutive narrative, in a word, the laying of the foundations of the art of historical writing, might well be termed, by students at least, an inestimable service. History was a branch of literature, historians being given one of the muses for their special protection, and the relationship was not then regarded as a cause for shame and should not now be looked upon as a subject for surprise.

If history could not become a science in classical times, it was still less likely to undergo such an evolution in the Middle Ages—the Ages of Faith. It suffered as literature did, as

science did, and it could but slowly recover what it had lost as an art. With literature, however, and the other arts, it has left us materials out of which, after many centuries of neglect, scholars have been able to construct something that is not a caricature of one of the most interesting phases of human evolution. With the Renaissance came, of course, a greatly increased opportunity and desire to study the masterpieces of classical historiography, and writers like Machiavelli modeled themselves upon ancient historians. The mediaeval chronicle still survived, however, in the form of annals, and the earlier modern historians like Lord Bacon showed through their uncritical method of handling their sources that the influence of the Ages of Faith was still upon them. Neither as a science nor as an art did history make much overt progress, the energies of men of learning being chiefly directed to the necessary amassing of linguistic and antiquarian knowledge, and men of letters still finding in the various forms of poetry the best medium of expression for their genius. But when at last the seventeenth century had laid the foundations of modern prose, especially in French and English, when it had stored up in great books of reference and in annotated editions of the classics the work of its herculean scholars and antiquaries, and when it had settled political and ecclesiastical questions to such an extent at least that national development on a broad scale was assured to some countries as a present possession and promised to others—after all these necessary steps had been taken, history as an art made, as might have been foreseen, a very rapid advance. Great Britain, to cite only one country, produced in the first half of the eighteenth century a number of writers who attempted, like Defoe, to give clear and consecutive accounts of political events, particularly since the Restoration—and during the second half of the century Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon raised the writing of history to the level of a true art. At about the same time Johnson and Boswell performed a similar service for biography, and Richardson and Fielding for that form of fictitious history known as the novel.

It has recently been declared that it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that history in its modern sense was at its lowest ebb. Gibbon, to be sure, is not included in this ex-

treme statement, because Gibbon was not only a great writer with a broad philosophical grasp and imaginative sweep, but also a great scholar endowed with zeal, patience, and critical sagacity. The reasons some members of the modern school are so hard on Gibbon's most distinguished contemporaries, seem to be two ; first because, owing to their want of zeal and critical acumen and to their lack of adequate collections of documents and the aids for using them, they produced books that are full of errors of fact ; secondly, because they paid great attention to details of composition and took frequent occasion to generalize and philosophize on the meaning of events and movements with which they often had but a vague and narrow acquaintance.

These grave charges against the historians who preceeded the critical German school of Niebuhr and Ranke are neither unfounded nor new. Dr. Johnson more than a hundred years ago pointed out as pithily as need be the essentially uncritical character of Lord Bacon's historical work, though he naturally thought more of his own contemporaries in the field of history than we are able to do ; and not many years later Southey called Robertson a rogue because that exemplary Scotch divine had not read the laws of Alonso the Wise before writing his famous introduction to his *Charles V.* Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that, whatever Robertson's lapses from that zeal for accuracy which characterizes the best modern scholars, he was insensible to the necessity of gathering accurate historical materials ; for, not only do his notes show a varied erudition, but he is represented in Boswell's *Tour to the Hebrides* as heartily agreeing with Dr. Johnson that steps should be taken to secure from every possible source information about the uprising of 1745. Love of truth and desire for accuracy were not born with Niebuhr and the Germans, but they have been made vastly more effective since nations have learned to cherish and render accessible their archives, since scholars have learned to co-operate, to apply the methods of study known loosely as critical and comparative, and to utilize not only the materials furnished by such practically new sciences as archaeology and anthropology, but also the example set by all scientists in their demand for a precise methodology, for a testing of

results, and an objective attitude toward their work. The moment we say this and realize what the total intellectual advance of the nineteenth century meant to the men engaged in any form of investigation, philological, literary, historical, scientific, we perceive how more than ungracious it is in those who are today profiting from the work of their immediate forerunners to cast reproach upon the scholars of the eighteenth century who came between the colossal gatherers of erudite information that adorned the seventeenth century and the resolute wielders of a critical method that made memorable the nineteenth. If only one of the three great English historians of the eighteenth century could accomplish work permanent both from the point of view of literary art and from that of scientific accuracy, all three helped on immensely the cause of history in one important respect.

They made it popular with the reading public because they brought it back to the standing as literature it had had in classical times. They showed men once more that it was possible to select and combine the multitudinous events of the past into picturesque and philosophic narratives. Two of them drew poorly and the colors they used have faded ; but the art they practiced has lived on. Without their labors who shall say that one of the chief glories of our own literature would have been the great group of the American historians ? Before Hume and Robertson wrote, Sir Robert Walpole in his retirement, when his son Horace proposed to read history to him, exclaimed, "No, don't read history to me ; that can't be true." Some of Sir Robert's contemporaries like Defoe did their best to base their histories on authentic documents, but they were generally partisan and nearly always dull, and no one who knows them will blame the old statesman for not wanting to hear them read aloud. I cannot help believing, however, that, if he had lived in the time of Hume, he might have listened to that Tory's perversions of history, and reserved his objurgations until the sound of the polished periods had died away. It is, I repeat, no small achievement for the representatives of any form of learning to gain the public ear.

It is plain that the attention thus secured has been held. History and biography have grown steadily in favor, until they may

truly be said to be formidable rivals of poetry and fiction. There were few more popular writers in America than the late John Fiske at the time of his death. Macaulay, whatever his limitations, was and is widely read. Prescott, Motley, and Parkman won renown quickly, and even Bancroft, for all his rhetoric, was better known as a historian than as a statesman. And, what is perhaps more to the point, it has been found profitable to translate the massive works of great foreign historians such as Ranke and Mommsen. A similar story may be told of the fortunes of biography throughout the past hundred years. Though a writer like Matthew Arnold could still speak of history as that Mississippi of falsehood, readers with an increasing sense of the value of facts turned to it as perhaps the most satisfactory form of literature. But whatever may have been the triumphs of literature during the nineteenth century—and they were undoubtedly great—it is plain that the triumphs of science were greater. If we were to use the phrase “the age of Tennyson” we should refer merely to an important but not consummately great epoch of English literature; but if we used the phrase “the age of Darwin,” we might legitimately be supposed to refer to the most important age of scientific discovery in the entire annals of the human race. Now as the materials of history and biography are what we call facts, as facts must be verified, and, as the verification of facts implies impartial scrutiny and the employment of the best available methods of research, it follows that in a scientific age the spirit in which history is studied and the methods by which its materials are gathered, sifted, and arranged would inevitably resemble, so far as the differing natures of their respective materials would allow, the spirit and methods of the workers in the various fields of natural science. The rise and triumph of the modern critical or semi-scientific school of Niebuhr and Ranke was a phenomenon which might have been predicted as readily as the rise of artistic history in the eighteenth century and of historical writing of a strictly classical type in the sixteenth. The scientific article and monograph concerned entirely with the announcement of some new bit of scientific information or some modification or confirmation or refutation of a scientific theory was of necessity paralleled by the historical article and mono-

graph having similar purposes and characteristics. And just as scientific work was best done in well equipped laboratories, especially in those connected with large universities, so historical work of the modern critical type was best done in connection with archives and libraries and by trained specialists occupying chairs in universities situated where books and documents could be most readily and most abundantly obtained.

There is much to be thankful for in all this, but I fail to see anything altogether wonderful it is, unless it be the extraordinary delusion that this quite explicable growth of the scientific school of historians gives that school the right to despise its predecessors and to fancy that its own success means the extinction of history as a branch of literature. We have been told recently that the writing of history has practically passed into the hands of the professors of history and that these have not the time to study the graces of style, in other words, to endeavor to make their books attractive to the public. They are to write as students of history for other students. I trust that this last statement will continue in a sense to be true; but I perceive no reason why students who write should not try to write well, or why students who read should not prefer and demand books worth reading, not merely for their substance but for their style.

I cannot see why, if a knowledge of the larger matters of science and history is both interesting and beneficial to the public, there should not continue to be a need for writers capable of serving as intermediaries between the active workers in the fields of science and history and the world of readers. Huxley was such a scientific interpreter or intermediary and Fiske, after more or less abandoning philosophy, held a similar position among historians. Neither was perhaps a worker, an investigator of a very high rank; both were literary men of considerable eminence. It is often taken for granted that it is impossible for the investigator and the eminent man of letters to be one and the same person. This proposition is unfounded. The combination was seen in Gibbon, and, if there has been only one Gibbon, it is equally true that there has been only one Shakspere, one Milton, one Newton. Do dramatists and poets and scientists, however, cease on that account to strive to reach the highest position in their calling that is possible with the

genius or the talents they possess? The modern dramatist, if he is sensible, will not imitate Shakspeare in a slavish fashion, but he will endeavor to interpret in the most effective way the life of his own times in accordance with the fundamental and venerable principles of dramatic art. He makes use of every device of the modern stage ; but he is none the less one of the numerous progeny of Aeschylus. It seems to me that the true historian ought, in a similar fashion, to be glad to count himself one of the numerous progeny of Herodotus. The picture-frame stage of today with its electric lighting and elaborate machinery is about as different from the orchestra in which the two actors of Aeschylus stalked on buskins and spoke their parts through masks as the methods employed by the modern historian to gather and sift his facts are from those used by Herodotus. But still, after all these centuries the prime purpose of the dramatist is to interpret life through human action exhibited on a stage, and the prime purpose of the historian is to give a record of the past through the medium of written words.

The dramatist who constructed plays only for the enjoyment of his fellow dramatists would be a laughing stock. Is the historian who writes history only for the instruction of his fellow historians any less a laughing stock? Leave the public out of your calculations, especially in this democratic age, and you are sure to come to grief—whether you are an artist, or a scientist, or a historian, or a political boss, or the president of a life-insurance company. If insensibility to the claims of the public brings no other loss to the historian than the loss of knowledge of men and of sympathy with them that characterizes all persons of a preponderatingly academic type, the consequence will be sufficiently serious. Does the professor-historian of the present suppose that he can sit in his study year in and year out and construct from the card index to his notes a satisfactory account of Roman politics in the days of Caesar and Cicero? If he does, I should like with all due modesty to advise him to take a few less notes and a little more interest in the politics of his ward, or else to cultivate his imagination by reading the great novels and plays in which political scenes are depicted, and to model his manner of presenting the results of his study upon that of the men of letters he is wont to look down upon. Let

him be as scientific as he can in amassing his material, but let him remember that if he divorces history from present life on the one hand and from literature on the other, he runs constant risk of committing blunders of every kind and degree—blunders of perspective, blunders in assigning motives, blunders in comprehension of details.

Now what is the drift of these remarks if it is not toward a warning against the creation among historians of what is called in other fields of activity a mandarin class or caste. In criticism, whether of literature or of the plastic arts, the past half century has witnessed too many attempts on the part of men of culture to hold themselves aloof as an elect body and to look down on the public as uncultivated and therefore incapable of passing judgment in matters literary and artistic. That the public is capable of applying the principles and rules of technical criticism no sane man would affirm, nor is it any more capable of testing accurately the statements contained in the histories and biographies it reads. But it is equally plain that the poem, the drama, the novel, the picture, the statue, the history, the biography that holds the attention only of men of letters, of artists, or of historians has failed of the largest and highest purpose its author or creator can have—with the exception of his desire to serve the cause of truth, beauty and goodness—I mean the purpose of adding to the information, the moral elevation, and the aesthetic pleasure of the largest possible public—which is, after all, but the practical result of his desire to serve the cause of truth, beauty, and goodness. This means simply that the labors of the artist, the man of letters, even the scientist ought not to be considered an end in themselves—that much at least of the dignity of such labors comes from the fact that they advance the cause of civilization, that is, redound to the advantage of every living man and woman and of the generations yet to come. This is not to say that those labors of the scientist or of the historian which result only in experiments and researches and the writing of books and monographs in which the public can take no true interest are not necessary and highly creditable. Countless specialists working in their laboratories and libraries are needed to furnish the facts from which constructive minds may develop the inventions,



the discoveries, the theories, and the works of art, which by fostering the emotional and intellectual capacities of the race make life better worth living. Thus, for example, the progress of history is undoubtedly dependent upon the labors of archivists, index-makers, collectors, archaeologists, antiquaries, writers of articles and monographs, and last but not least, of teachers of history and historical methodology, most of whom must live and die unknown to the larger world of readers, unhonored and uncomprehended save by their fellow workers.

They are engaged in the essential task of furnishing and fashioning the stones of which the edifice is to be composed. The architect will receive all or nearly all the praise, and in this fact there is a certain injustice which is attributable, not to human ingratitude, but to the finite capacity of the mind for remembering details. These unapplauded workmen are sustained in their labors by their devotion to truth, by their love of their work, and by the sympathy and commendation of their fellow toilers. If however, they imagine, as some of them seem to do, that the quarrying and polishing of stones—the discovery and presentation of historical details—is an end in itself worthy of benediction, they make, it would appear, a flagrant mistake. Their labors must result in an edifice or they are in vain. And the edifice must be well built, or shame rather than glory, loss rather than profit will ensue. To drop my metaphors, history in any true sense of the word, is not synonymous with historical research and the materials it furnishes. It is based upon these and in so far it has its affiliations with science; it is also indissolubly connected with literature, and with philosophy as the latter term is broadly understood, and in so far it has its affiliations with art and thought. It is well that this is so; otherwise we might be compelled to give assent to the clever generalization contained in Anatole France's question "Who does not know today that the historians preceded the archaeologists as the astrologists preceded the astronomers, as the alchemists preceded the chemists, as monkeys preceded men!" Here a literary man has amusingly turned the tables on the gentlemen who abuse Robertson and Carlyle. The true "latter-day" scientists are the archaeologists—those amiable destroyers of Prescott's Aztec palaces and other historical creations; who will

make the archaeologists "seem old-fashioned," M. France does not venture to predict, and we may imitate his prudent reticence, especially if we concur with Professor Firth in believing that history is both a science and an art, and if we have confidence that these will continue to be two of the main foundation stones of civilization,

We are now prepared, I hope—not, indeed, to indicate with precision the relations between history and literature, for we gave up the attempt to define these many-sided studies—but to conclude that their relations need at no time be antagonistic and may often with advantage be friendly. Neither those students who hold that the historian's aims and methods must be entirely scientific nor those who confine the term "literature" to writings of an imaginative type can justly be said to take a catholic point of view warranted by logic and by experience. Almost from the earliest times an artistic presentation in written words of the record of man's achievements has given the pleasure that is denominated literary; hence history has been rightly regarded as a branch of literature. For history to cease to be a form of literature would mean a loss to that great body of books which is probably the most important basis of the world's culture; it would also, as we have perceived, mean a loss to history itself through the inevitable narrowing of the historian's appeal to his fellow men and of his grasp upon the facts of life present and past. The historian must be more than a man of letters, for if his work is to endure he must be a scientific investigator; but in this respect he is no worse off than the dramatist, who truly to succeed, must master both the art of the writer in verse or prose and the craft of the playwright, the man who fits an action for representation on a stage. Both history and the drama are more than literature; both in their best estate are literature. So it has always been; so, unless the needs and capabilities of the race change greatly, may it always be.

There are other aspects of this question that I should like to discuss, but my time is drawing to a close. It would be worth while to endeavor to show that much of the inaccuracy that is charged against historians is due to the fact that they are errant human beings and not to the methods of research and

writing they employ. A narrow-minded man will do injustice to the great figures of the past with whom he deals, whether or not he try to follow scrupulously every precept contained in that admirable compendium, *Introduction to Historical Studies*, by Langlois and Seignobos. A skilled artistic historian, who is at the same time a partisan, will unintentionally disseminate errors which the labors of generations of scholars will not suffice to dispel. Milton's conviction that a noble life is the indispensable basis for every noble poem holds true, with modifications, of great history and great criticism, and, indeed, of every phase of man's dealing with his fellow man. Take, for example, the important matter of assigning motives for conduct. Will absolute accuracy with regard to the external features of our great Civil War enable any historian to describe that struggle satisfactorily, if he imputes motives and feelings to the leaders of either side which those who knew and fought with them cannot accept as characteristic of the men? Here, it seems to me, we have a common ground on which historians of all kinds can very profitably meet and join in a litany, "From hasty and prejudiced judgments, good Lord, deliver us." Mr. Hillaire Belloc, in a recent article entitled "Ten Pages of Taine," has apparently shown how misleading is the portrait that famous historian painted of Danton; yet, in his paper, he constantly argues that Taine was deliberately trying to deceive his readers. Such a procedure suggests a man holding on to the coat of another in rapid motion, and, while he is tugging and calling "Stop thief," endeavoring to pick the pocket of the coat he is clutching. I suppose that no honest biographer or historian will refuse to confess that he would willingly blot out many a line which he originally penned with all honesty of intention and under the conviction that he had exhausted every accessible source of pertinent knowledge. He has not grown more honest and perhaps he has received no specific new information of any importance; he has only grown wiser and more charitable through living, through fuller opportunities to study his fellow men. Historians do not willingly cheat themselves and their readers, as one might infer to be their unhappy custom, if one were to rely upon the charges and inuendoes of their hostile, self-assertive critics; but they sometimes seem

to make statements loose enough to warrant Carlyle's speaking of history as "a distillation of Rumour." They would escape many such errors if they would resolutely avoid the imputation of motives and also if they would suppress to a fair degree their own egotism. For example, if Carlyle himself, as Professor Morse Stephens tells us, had not been offended at the refusal of the authorities of the British Museum to give him a working-room to himself, he would doubtless have become far better acquainted with the pamphlet literature of the French Revolution, with the probable result that he would have gained in reliability without necessarily losing in picturesqueness.

But what in conclusion, (going back to our main theme), can you as a historical society find of value in the conception of history as in its best estate a branch of literature upon which I have insisted throughout this discussion. It seems to me that, if you accept this conception fully, several advantageous consequences ought to follow.

As a society in its corporate capacity cannot produce a living book, a true piece of literature, you will regard yourselves as primarily concerned in scientific historical research and in publishing the results of such research—that is to say, as engaged in ancillary labors rather than in what may be termed the masterwork of construction. This is not to say that as individuals you may not or should not have the hope and the intention of contributing a chapter or a volume to the history of our native state which readers beyond Virginia's confines may be glad to peruse. It means only that as a society your chief function is to encourage research, to collect documents and other materials illustrating Virginia history, to publish such documents as well as papers and books embodying the work of research, and to foster in every way public interest in local historical studies. But as a society you cannot well construct history in the artistic or the philosophical sense of the term, and, this not being your function, it follows that you can find no real justification for limiting, hampering, or in any way endeavoring to shape the work of those students who devote themselves to the production of artistic or philosophical history. It is not, I conceive, your function to say that you will collect materials that throw light on one phase of our past, but will leave in oblivion

materials that bring into relief manners or customs or institutions with which you do not sympathize and the existence of which you would willingly forget. Your prime purpose is to furnish materials which shall assist in the determination of historical truth, so far as there is such a thing as historical truth. This means that your work is scientific in character and that your standards and methods, whether of collection, or examination, or publication, should be scientific. Which of your so-called facts or truths the literary or philosophical historian selects or rejects in the composition of his narrative or treatise is a matter that concerns you mainly or entirely in your individual capacity as critics of his book. You should give him a free hand, because to limit creative art or philosophical thought is neither more nor less than to impede civilization ; it is to take us a step backward toward the dark ages. You will limit art and thought if you fail to furnish them with the most ample materials on which to work ; you will also limit them if you attempt in the least to prescribe the manner in which they shall handle their materials.

Your position is, I repeat, an ancillary one with regard both to writers and thinkers on historical matters and to the general public. The public has always turned, and I think always will turn for its information to artists and thinkers who write rather than to investigators or collectors or students or teachers who are not endowed with special literary gifts. The artists and thinkers must be investigators themselves, or else must rely upon the work of the latter, who thus stand at one remove from the public, but are none the less popular benefactors.

In view of what I have just said you will not be surprised when I add that I believe you can, as a society, in no better way aid the cause of Virginia history than by increasing your collection of books and manuscripts in every legitimate fashion, by cataloguing it in the most minute manner, by indexing unedited documents, and by giving students at a distance every opportunity to use such of your materials as are not unique or very rare. Perhaps no one feature of the astonishing development of our national system of library management is more remarkable than the system of inter-library loans, which is gradually placing at the disposal of the student with proper

credentials a large proportion of the entire stock of books owned by the public libraries of the country. I should like to see the day come when a student in the smallest village of Virginia could secure at his home through the State Library and the library of this society practically every book of importance having a bearing on our history as well as photographic reproductions of every important document. A beginning of this good work has already been made, and its completion is no Utopian dream. I have no desire whatsoever to disparage the importance of individual research and publication on the part of the members of this or any other historical society ; I do not underestimate the value of the genealogical work which such societies are wont to undertake ; I recognize the usefulness and the attractiveness of the studies in colonial history which some of them have prosecuted almost to the total neglect of other periods of history, but I do not hesitate to say that in my judgment the first and most important work any historical society should attempt is to develop and facilitate the use of its archives and its library.

This means that collecting and cataloguing and indexing and publishing and loaning whatsoever will aid the student of history to prosecute his studies in whatever spot fortune has made his home, will do more to stimulate the writing of history and to encourage a public interest in history than the elucidation of a thousand knotty points by a thousand acute scientific papers and monographs can possibly do. Let us have the acute papers and monographs by all means, but let us also have strong corporate efforts to make possible the writing of dignified historical books and the spread of a love of history throughout the masses of the people. If history is a science to be prosecuted by professors and a few students and to be caviare to the public, I wish it and them all success ; but I cannot perceive any very solid ground on which State appropriations and individual benefactions can be demanded or requested in order that the scientists may pursue their studies under the best auspices. But if, as I have tried to show, history is not only a science but an art ; if it is a branch of literature, and as such an important factor in the culture of the people at large, then it seems to me that we are all, scientific students of history, writers of historical

narratives, philosophical historians, and readers of history and biography, coworkers in one of the noblest of all tasks—the task of preserving the memory of the deeds of our fathers for the encouragement and the warning of ourselves and our children and our children's children—to the end that civilization may be advanced and the ways of God be justified to men. The most sublime epic in all literature was written with this lofty purpose, to “justify the ways of God to men,” and, whether or not the poet succeeded in his task, there can be but one opinion as to the transcendent importance of his undertaking. If the same lofty purpose is kept in view by all who deal with history, there will be fewer attempts to divorce that great study from literature, and every lover of his kind will be impelled to bid “God speed” to you and to every other Society engaged in historical labors.